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Contra coverup II

The first weeks of the congressional hearings on the Iran/Contra matter came up with too many answers to the wrong questions. So many, in fact, that one began to wonder whether the real question was not "What did Reagan know and when did he know it?" but what should Congress know and why doesn't it want to know it? At times the inquiry hardly seemed an investigation at all, but rather a half-hearted search for a few scraps to throw the public and the media, a sacrifice play to prevent the full extent of a quarter century of secret American foreign policy from open scrutiny.

William Casey's passing simplified matters; dead CIA men tell no tales. And it opened the way to hang the whole sordid mess on a handful of rogues and ruffians and be done with it. As for Reagan, he could be counted upon to leave everyone as confused about reality as he is himself. Like Bernie Goetz's subway targets, even if he told the truth, how would you know?

The first real hint that Congress was working up its own containment policy was the immunity game the Hill committee attempted to play — restrained largely, it would appear, by the independent prosecutor, Lawrence Walsh, going public with his complaints. The congressional line was that the most critical element was the people's right to know, a noble argument but one that lost force as the committee proceeded to forget it almost as soon as it got the television time to enforce that right. There have, as this is written, been few memorable moments during the hearings, but perhaps the repeated reference to unindicted co-conspiratorial countries by number rather than by name deserves some recognition as a worthy symbol of Congress's approach to the matter: the truth may set you free — but not at the expense of good relations with South Korea or Saudi Arabia.

This little nicety suggests just where the American citizen stands in this business. Never mind that the country's secret policies have clearly run amuck; that the people entrusted with protecting the gossamer goal "national security" were staging a coup against the Congress, the Constitution and the citizenry. The "national security" is still sacred, average Americans are still not cleared to know vital information about their government, and we are told in so many words, by that sophorific collection of legislators to leave it to them.

Given the increasing evidence that "national security" serves to provide cover for a plethora of illegal, immoral or just stupid activities and given a similar growth of evidence that the abuse of secret powers is not an individual aberration as the Iran-Contra hearers seem to want us to believe, but a whole way of life, leaving it to adjudication behind closed congressional doors is dangerous to health of the American people. Remember that the people sitting behind the dais of the hearing room are the same people who voted to spend $35 billion of your tax dollars on secret programs under the so-called "black budget." The tale of the Iran/Contra affair is, in part, the tale of what happens when you short-circuit public access to information about government policies. And the people asking all those pseudo-tough questions are same ones who don't want to tell you how $35 billion of your money is being spent.

This is also a story of evil, incompetence, and corruption that appears to go far beyond individual acts. What we are getting is a rare glimpse of a whole part of our government about which most have known far too little. The difference with this crowd is that they got caught. We must ask, even if our legislators

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won't, what did others do who never got caught? And what are they doing now?

There are more questions that need to be asked and, if they are not asked, we need to ask why they aren't.

For example, there are strong indications that the government was used drug smugglers to transfer weapons to Central America in return for landing rights for drugs in this country. This is not a revelation; it has been reported on national television and in respectable publications. Nothing would do more to spark public interest in the current hearings than an examination of this question. Why — as this is written at least, has this critical area been largely ignored?

Many of the names that have cropped up in and around the hearings are not new ones. Some, it has been alleged, were involved in trading with drug dealers in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam era — again in the name of keeping the America safe from the communist hordes. The drug aspect of the Vietnam war has never been openly examined and you can bet that your intrepid investigators on Capitol Hill don't want to hear about it now — despite obvious parallels with the Central American situation.

What about other secret team activities like Operation Mongoose (directed by then Vice President Nixon against Cuban leaders), the Phoenix program (again allegedly financed by drugs) in Vietnam that killed some 60,000 Vietnamese civilians, the assassination of Salvador Allende, training and assistance to the Iranian secret police under the Shah, secret arms sales to the Middle East beginning in the mid-1970s that served as a model (albeit on a much larger scale) for the most recent deal, the destabilization of the Australian Labour government in 1975, the supplying of arms to Nicaragua's Anastasio Somozo despite a ban on such activities by President Carter and Congress, the involvement of South Africa and Israel in the supplying of arms to the Contras, and the use of Saudi Arabia as a source of funds for aid to the South African-backed UNITA Angolan rebels?

Again, these are not revelations. Documentation for these stories is available to any member of the committee from such private investigatory groups as the Christic Institute. But have they done even preliminary investigation? There is little indication of it. This is perhaps not surprising when a Washington Post story reports that a high Reagan administration official with knowledge of the Iran/Contra deal was questioned only 90 minutes by committee investigators and a lawyer for another target said "he was surprised at the lack of preparation" on the part of the investigators. A Senator not on the committee expressed concern to the Post that the inquiry was being narrowed.

Perhaps the best indication that the Senate-House committee is **not** throwing the case would be if it were to publicly examine the aforementioned stories. The probability of this happening is virtually nil, for as the Religious Task Force on Central America put it recently:

"It has become clearer over the past few months that the Contragate scandal is only the tip of the iceberg in a history of secret operations spanning the past 25 years by a highly covert team of persons in and out of government. Full revelation would have enormous consequences for US foreign policy..."

To avoid this result, it appears that the fix is in on Capitol Hill. Despite the fact that these stories are connected, with overlapping operatives, systems and tactics, Congress does not want the public to know what its government has done in the name of "national security." Which, of course, is the surest way for it to happen again.

In investigations like this, the logjam of information is sometimes broken by a brave act of truth by a witness. In this investigation, what seems to be needed is a brave act of honesty and openess by a member of the committee, challenging the refusal of colleagues to let the public in on their government's dirty secrets. As things now stand, we may get more truth from those behind the witness table than from those in front of it.

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A short guide to the farm crisis

Number of Americans living on farms
1937: 25% 1960: 8% 1987: 3%

Number of Farmers Put Out of Business Since 1981
500,000+

What it costs to grow a pound of rice in Texas and what the farmer gets
14 cents vs. 4 cents

First year since 1941 the value of average farmland stopped increasing
1982

Average drop in value of a Texas farmer's land and assets 1985-1986
21%

1985 poverty rate
Rural counties: 18.3% Metropolitan counties: 12.7

Number of non-rural counties on Census Bureau's list of poorest counties
1

Number of farms going out of business per day 1985-1986
250-300

Number of non-farm businesses forced to close each day at this rate of failure, according to the Joint Economic Committee
40-50

Drop in retail sales since 1980
In towns of less than 1000 people: 32% In towns of 2500-5000 people: 17%

Number of towns Nebraska can expect to lose by the year 2000 according to the Joint Economic Committee
500

Farm income as a percent of urban income
1977: 91% 1984: 76%

Number of farm equipment dealers who have shut down since 1981
2300+

Number of banks shut down in Texas
1986: 26 1987 (thru May): 23

Loss of other rural jobs
Mining job loss in past decade: 300,000 Timber job loss since 1979: 100,000
Textile production job loss since 1979: 165,000

Estimated percent of farms that will be forced out of business due to biotechnology developments according to the Office of Technological Assessment
50%

"You can still make a small fortune in agriculture; the problem is you've got to start with a large fortune"
—West Texas farmer

Data from a speech by Texas Agriculture Commissioner Jim Hightower to the Rural Advancement Fund of the National Sharecroppers Fund, May 8.

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Political notes

● As we went to press, the three top Democratic candidates in the polls — Jackson, Dukakis and Simon, are also the three most liberal.

● Good and lengthy roundup of the Democratic candidates in the April Atlantic Monthly. The piece, by William Schneider has been somewhat surpassed by events (Hart out, Simon in) but is still one to save. Includes this frightening quote from Babbitt: "Social justice and equity are only on the table for discussion in the context of economic growth."

● Paul Simon's campaign is being managed by former Representative Floyd Fithian who lost a Senate race in 1982 against Richard Lugar. Finance director is Bob Edgar, another ex-representative who lost his attempt to unseat Arlen Specter. Prior to that, however, Edgar had a long record of winning as a liberal Democrat in a conservative district.

● One reason Jesse Jackson is taking such a reasoned approach to the personal morality issue may be found in a 1975 book, "Jesse Jackson: The Man, the Movement, the Myth" by Chicago Tribune reporter Barbara Reynolds. Reynolds discusses Jackson's extra-curricular activities in the book and said recently that she sees no difference between what Hart did and Jackson has done.

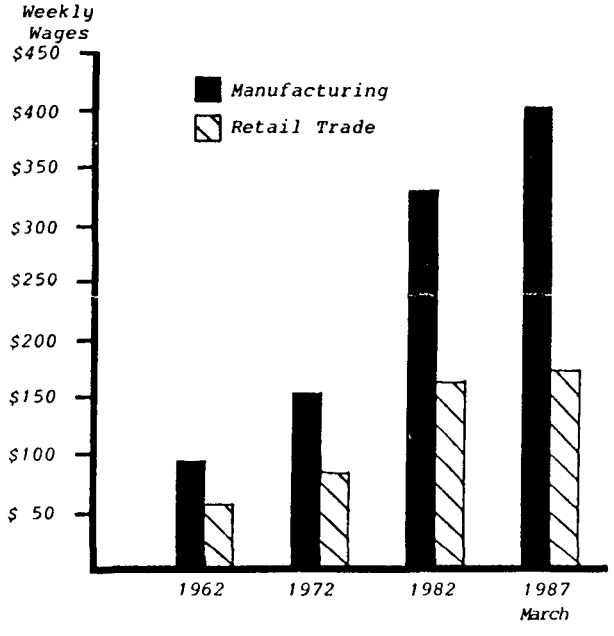
● Those attracted to Dukakis should check out Andrew Kopkind's rambling but useful article in the May 16 issue of The Nation. Among other things, Kopkind notes that "a successful workfare program, which provides the service sector with welfare mothers, has so softened support for the welfare system that a state court recently declared the Dukakis administration derelict in its duty to provide public assistance above the poverty line; the Governor is appealing the decision. Nor is there any continuing public day care, well-staffed or not, for the children of workfare."

● Ann Lewis is leaving ADA as national director the end of this month. Word is that she was unhappy with the national board and it was unhappy with her management. Many staff members loyal to her are also heading out to other pastures.

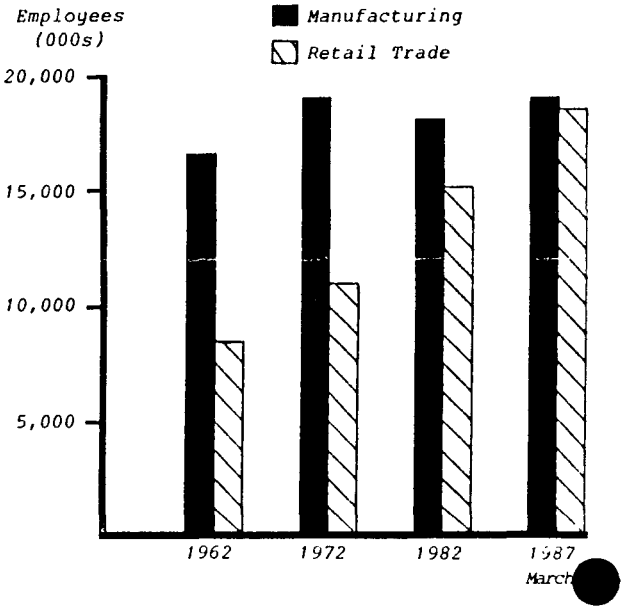
● Russell Means of the American Indian Movement says he's running for the Libertarian Party nomination for president. Says Means:

The Changing Economy

Comparison of Weekly Earnings
in Manufacturing and Retail Trade
1962 - March 1987



Comparison of Employment
in Manufacturing and Retail Trade
1962 - March 1987



These charts, from the Council on International and Public Affairs, show the dramatic changes in the nature of employment in the American economy (right) compared with the wages paid in the two major areas of manufacturing and retail trade.

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"We will prove to every American that America is becoming one big Indian reservation. I challenge every American to make a list of what they feel their individual rights are, and then, item by item, find out how much government is interfering with those rights."

• David Garth was the PR man behind John Lindsay's successful re-election bid that was based on the theme, "I've made mistakes." Garth thinks Hart should have followed suit. It would have led to a general debate about what's important in a president and the public would have soon forgiven him. And, says Garth, "How about this for a media campaign: Four equal-sized photographs of Roosevelt, Eisenhower, Kennedy and Hart under the slogan 'In a Great Tradition?'"

• Betty Friedan on the same subject: "Sexual behavior should be a private matter. But somehow flaunting it shows an arrogance toward women and all voters. There's a kind of implied denigration of women, a lack of respect of the values of women. It suggests an instability that I would not want in the president. This is the last time a candidate will be able to treat women as bimbos."

• Presidential candidates are finding that vendors have gotten wise to their free-spending, debt-ridden ways and increasingly are demanding money up front. Says an aide to Joseph Biden, "It's like you always have to walk around with checks in your pocket... Everything is by deposit... Credit is an awfully scarce commodity." With chartered airlines, "There's no room for discussion. The checks must be in their hands before they leave the ground." Not all candidates have a dead-beat reputation. One envelope maker says he'll bill the Dole campaign because they pay "very fast."

• By the time of the 1988 elections are held it is estimated that there will be ten million more eligible female voters than male voters. As an idea of the importance of this, the New York Times recently reported that if only men had voted in the last congressional election, the Democrats would have lost nine of their current Senate seats and would now be in the minority.

More on Mondragon

We recently told you about the important and fascinating economic and social policies of Mondragon, Spain, a cooperative-based community finding a third way between socialism and capitalism. Here are some additional notes:

• Terry Mollner, author of 'The Mondragon Cooperatives and Trusteeship' writes: "The uniqueness of Mondragon is demonstrated in the way profits are distributed by the cooperative. Seventy percent are distributed among the worker-owners based on salary scale and the number of years with the cooperative. They are allocated to the worker-owners' internal capital account and regarded as a loan from the worker to the cooperative. Each year, just before Christmas, the worker receives, in cash, the six percent interest paid annually on his or her internal account. Thus, the worker-owner's investment in the cooperative increases and the cooperative reinvests the worker's profits to create more worker-owned jobs. The business receives uncollateralized capital at a low interest rate, normally the most difficult and expensive capital to borrow.

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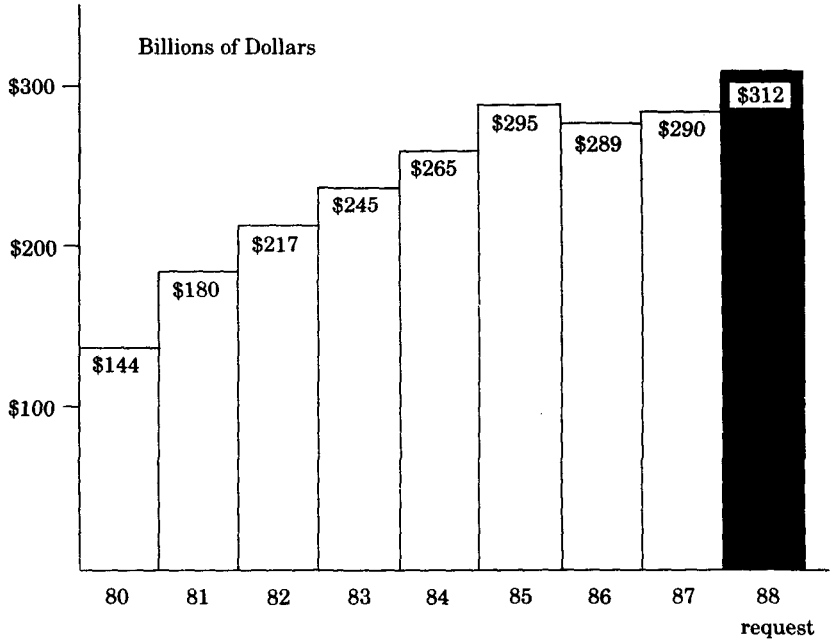
MILITARY SPENDING DOUBLES SINCE 1980



Source: DoD

Chart by CDI

The Reagan Administration embarked upon the largest peacetime military buildup in U.S. history. The U.S. has spent $1.9 Trillion on the military since 1980. Military spending has more than doubled since 1980, growing at an average annual rate of 10.5%.

The Reagan Administration is projecting military spending of $1.8 Trillion from 1988 to 1992, with an average annual growth of 6.2%. The military budget under these projections will be nearly $400 Billion by 1992.

*Fiscal Year 1988 runs from October 1, 1987 to September 30, 1988.

--Center for Defense Information

"Ten percent of the annual profits are donated to charity, and the remaining 20 percent is retained in the collective internal account and also reinvested to create more worker-owned jobs. If the cooperative ever ceases to exist, this collective account will be donated to charity because it is regarded as the portion of profits which is collectively owned and managed for the general welfare. So even the profits escape the time and space material axis by seeming to go in two directions at the same time. The worker-owner has the use of the his or her portion of the 70 percent because it can be used as collateral at the bank for a loan which will be at an interest rate only a point or two over the six percent it is earning. Yet the cooperative has the use of the capital at the same time."

o Mollner also points to the independent invention of a similar community in Poland, which employs some 175,000 people, back in the 1940s and more recent Mondragon-type systems in Sri Lanka and elsewhere. There are also a few similarities between Mondragon and the Greenbelt (Md.) cooperative community started in the New Deal and now celebrating its 50th anniversary. Although the media projects a generic modal of competitiveness and corporate capitalism as the traditional American economy, there is a long and hardy tradition of cooperatives in this country, today including such major institutions as United Services Automobile Association, Land of Lakes Butter, Scan Furniture, and the Green Bay Packers. Mollner notes that in the 18th and 19th centuries there was talk of a "cooperative commonwealth" as an American ideal. In 1800, less than 2 percent of free Americans worked for someone else. Today th figure is 95%. Says Mollner, "the story of America during the 1800s is one of failed efforts by Americans to prevent the erosion of

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the 'cooperative commonwealth' they knew in their rural townships."

• The Mondragon West Development Group is struggling to create a network of workers' cooperatives in the Seattle area. Info: MWDG, PO Box 31023, Seattle WA 98103.

• Meanwhile, in a related item, a network of two dozen non-profit groups in San Francisco has taken some unique steps to serve the 24,000 people living in that city's Tenderloin district — including the purchase of a Sizzler Restaurant franchise, with profits going to help subsidize a 157-unit hotel for the elderly and mentally handicapped that is above the eatery. The network also owns an estimated 25% of the housing in the neighborhood, which is believed to be the largest concentration of non-profit housing in the country. Much of this has been financed with private loans and community development block grants awarded by the city.

WEATHER REPORT

High school recruiting

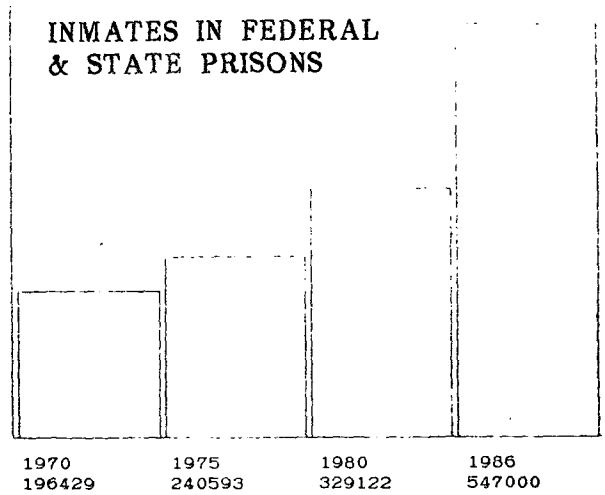
Recon Network reports that the Committee Opposed to Militarism and the Draft has reached a comprehensive settlement with a California high school district which will give CCMD the same right as military recruiters and the Selective Service to place ads in student papers. The case originated from a 1982 decision by the district to ban anti-military ads.

Freeze and SANE to merge

The nation's two largest peace groups, SANE and the Freeze, plan to merge by the end of the year. SANE has over 155,000 members the Freeze has more than 1800 local groups. The two organizations are currently looking for a president to press the new group's agenda. The group hopes to have a new president by September.

Inmates in prisons set record

A record number of inmates were in the nation's federal and state prisons last year according to the Justice Department. Since 1980, the prison population has increased



approximately 66% to 547,000. Of these, 27,000 were female. State prisons are estimated to be operating at between 106% to 124% of capacity while federal prisons are operating at 127% to 159% of capacity.

Obscenity abolished in Oregon

The Supreme Court of Oregon has thrown out an obscenity cases against a Redmond adult bookstore. The decision, written by the court's most conservative judge, was based on the Oregon constitution which reads, in part:

"No law shall be passed restraining the free expression of opinion, or restricting the right to speak, write or print freely on any subject whatever."

The court ruled: "We hold that characterizing expression as 'obscenity' under any definition does not deprive it of protection under the Oregon constitution. Obscene speech, writing, or equivalent forms of communication are 'speech' nonetheless."

The court indicated that a community could zone adult bookstores, for example, but "no law can prohibit or censor the communication itself." And the court noted that the writers of the state's constitution in 1857 were "rugged and robust individuals dedicated to founding a free society unfettered by the governmental imposition of some people's view of morality on the free expression of others."

Soviet-US scientists warn on rain forests

In a joint communique released by the Environmental Policy Institute, a group of American and Soviet scientists has warned that up to a billion people will starve to death in the tropics as a result of the deforestation of the world's rain forests. Unless present trends are reversed, the forests will be destroyed within the next 30 years. The Soviet scientists

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represented the Russian equivalent of the EPA, the ministry of agriculture, the national academy of sciences and Moscow State University. The US representatives came from EPI, the National Audobon Society, the World Resources Institute, Natural Resources Defense Council and the Environmental Defense Fund. The forests are currently being clear cut at a rate of about 40 acres a minute.

Readings

Civil Liberties in the 100th Congress: Detailed report from the ACLU, 122 Maryland Ave NE, DC 20002. $3.

New Families: a Journal of Transitions: This is not one of your slick yuppy rags but a serious and readable publication for modern families. Spring issues includes articles on job sharing, tax reform and home business, family networks and redefining your standard of living. Subscriptions to this quarterly are $ from New Families, PO Box 41108, Fayetteville, NC 28309

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